

A Study on Korean Young Children's Writing Development and Parents' Perception of Writing Education

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This study aims to examine writing development in young children aged 2-6 years and investigate the parents' perceptions of their children's writing education and inspect cultural differences in their writing. The participants were five young children and their parents living in Seoul. Based on writing development stages suggested by Sulzby, children's writing outcomes were analysed, as well as data collected from parents' questionnaires. First, in accordance with age, Sulzby's developmental stage of children's writing was noticed. Second, parents' perception of their children's writing development provided insights into the role of the parents in children's writing development. All parents who participated in this study did not provide formal education for their children; nevertheless, the young children participated in this study demonstrated the development phase of writing education appropriate for their age group. Third, a cultural influence in the writing of young children was underlined.

Key words: *Young Children, Writing Development, Parent's Perception, Writing Education.*

Introduction

Literacy education is a major concern in Korea. In fact, parents have a strong belief that both writing and reading are the foundation of successful learning at school, so these two language skills are started in the very early childhood education centers. Particularly as for writing skills, many parents continue to presume that writing is a language skill that children must be taught with planned systematic instructions and accordingly they demand a formal education for their young children's literacy (Song, 2004). Consequently, early childhood education centers that emphasize the formal teaching of how to read and write without considering their developmental characteristics have increased (Kim and Kwak, 2016).

The age ranges from 3 to 5 years for young children in Nuri National Curriculums in Korea (Ministry of Education & Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2013) emphasizes that communication is the most important objective of language learning. In the writing section, the content is divided into two parts such as 'Interested in writing' and 'Using writing aids' in order to avoid formal skills-oriented teaching on writing to stimulate enjoyable learning through abundant language activities.

Nevertheless, a study (Kim, 2002) surveying the function of writing between 4 and 5 year old children in Korea indicated that the highest proportion of young children considered writing as a means for learning while only 4.5% perceived writing as pleasure. In addition, another study (Kim, 2011) that examined the concept of writing for 5 and 6 year olds in Korea showed the highest percentage of children who said that the purpose of writing is to study well. This demonstrates that they recognize writing as either formal learning or as important for study. On the other hand, researchers found that some pre-schoolers were able to read and write independently without any formal training in reading and writing (Hildreth, 1936; Durkin, 1966; Clark, 1976; Teale, 1982; Harste et al., 1984). This implies that in the end, the path of early childhood writing education may vary depending on what perspective you have on writing development (Jung, 2016). Viewpoints on children's writing development can be identified as a conventional maturational perspective that highlights readability and an angle of emergent literacy theory that stresses the social psychology and linguistic aspects of language learning.

According to the Maturational outlook that lay stress on readiness, children learned to write when they were given formal lessons in the first grades at schools. Gesell, who recognized maturation as the most essential element in learning the written language, has supported this approach. Meanwhile, in terms of emergent literacy theory, they believe that writing ability in young children is not acquired by explicit teaching, rather it is developed naturally by shaping and internalizing necessary knowledge through interaction with the outside (Jung, 2016).

Whereas a great deal of studies was based on the concept of natural maturation as the precursor of writing development, others have proven that critical development of the children's ability to an original piece of written discourse takes place from late infancy forward (Read, 1971; Goodman, 1985; Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1981, 1984; Sulzby & Teale, 1985; Morrow, 1989). Researchers based on emergent literacy theory have reached at various descriptions of what can be viewed as developmental stages of young children's writing (Hildreth, 1936; Clay, 1975; Dyson, 1985; Sulzby and Teale, 1985). Hildreth (1936) described the developmental sequences in name writing. She found that children's name writing samples progressed through several procedures: aimless scribbling; systematic up and

down scratching; horizontal movements with vertical strokes; separate symbols; correctly formed letters mixed with incorrectly formed letters; and finally, correct spelling of the first name with occasional reversals. In Australian children's early print awareness, Clay (1975) found that as children evolve into more aware of the forms of writing, their responses to print become more directly related to the graphic information. On top of that, children steadily build up a perceptual awareness of the written symbol system, and they have a tendency to make over-generalization or gross approximations employing peculiar letter-like forms, invented words and make-believe sentences and so on.

In line with those researches, Dyson (1982) describes children's writing development in two phases. From birth to age three, children begin to explore the form of writing by random scribbling. After that, as children progress from three to six, their controlled scribbling gradually develops into recognizable forms that they name and, in the similar pattern, the scribbling progressively acquires the characteristics of print-including linearity, horizontal orientation, and the arrangement of letter-like forms. Sulzby (1985) identified six broad categories of writing in a sample of twenty-four kindergarten children: writing via drawing, writing via scribbling, writing via making letter-like forms, writing via reproducing well-learned units, writing via invented spelling and writing via conventional spelling. Moreover, Sulzby highlights these phases should not be considered as a reflection of writing developmental stage in order, due to the fact that two or three stages may overlap in one age level rather than these stages appear in sequence only.

This study is an attempt to gain a better understanding of how children learn to write during the early years without the assistance of planned systematic instruction. 'How' and 'when' these children learn to write will enhance insight into our basic understanding of the writing acquisition process in young children's learning. In general, it may also provide guidance for writing instruction and improve understanding of the role of the parents in the learning process. This is the reason that this study investigated young Korean children's process of writing development and reviewed the perception of parents. In addition, cultural impact on their writing also was explored.

In order to achieve the above objectives, this study set up the following research questions;

1. According to the young children's age, is a meaningful stage of writing development carried out?
2. How do parents' perceptions of early childhood writing developments manifest?
3. Do cultural factors influence the writing development of young children?

Design of the Study

Research Subject

The participants of this study are both five Korean children aged three to six and their parents. Three of the children were girls and two were boys, and all of them lived in Seoul. As for the parents, the average age of mothers was 32 years old while that of fathers was 36 years old. Most of the households were middle-class families in Korea.

Descriptions of the five participants and their parents' socioeconomic status are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Description of the subjects and parent's socioeconomic status

NAME	AGE	SEX	EDUCATIONAL LEVEL		OCCUPATION	
			MOTHER(age)	FATHER(age)	MOTHER	FATHER
SJ	2y4m	M	bachelor(32)	bachelor(36)	Housewife	Salaryman
DY	3y3m	F	bachelor(32)	master(37)	Housewife	Manager
JE	4y4m	F	master(31)	master(36)	Piano	Salaryman
GT	5y9m	M	high school	bachelor(38)	teacher	Salaryman
GE	6y1m	F	grad bachelor(32)	bachelor(32)	Housewife Housewife	Pastor

Collection of Data and Research Tools

In order to look into the phase of writing development of young children, this study adopted the stage of writing development of young children, which was suggested by Sulzby (1985). Each child was tested individually. The first task was divided into three parts: first, he/she wrote his or her own name; second, he/she wrote any other letters; third, he/she read what had been written. Next, the second task was to draw anything that child desired. Finally, the final task was to write a letter and to read that letter. Korean college students in majoring early childhood education presented these tasks. Students encouraged young children to participate in the projects with interest and help them to finish the tasks on their own. Furthermore, a questionnaire was administered to parents to figure out how they perceived their children's writing development, according to the questionnaire in Harste and his colleagues (1984).

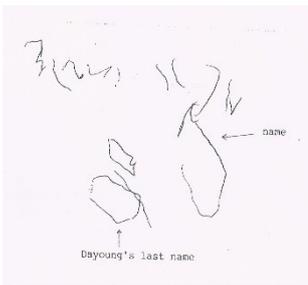
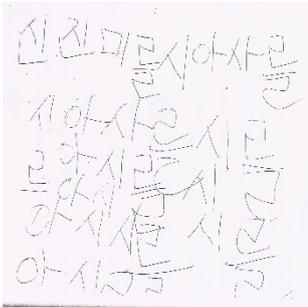
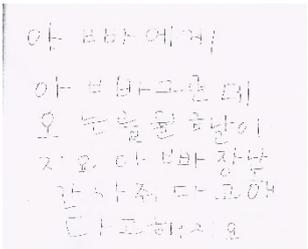
Analysis and Findings

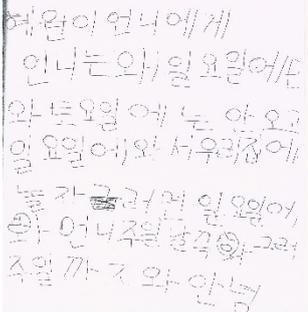
Children's Writing Development Stages

The writings of young children in this study revealed Sulzby's stages of writing development, except invented spelling stage: SJ (2:4), drawing and scribbling stage; DY (3:3), letter-like

forms stage; JE (4:4), reproducing well-learned units stage and conventional spelling stage; GT (5:9), conventional spelling stage; GE (6:1), conventional spelling stage.

Table 2: illustrates the analysis results to find the stage of writing development in young children.

Table 2. Analysis of children's writing developmental stage			
NAME	WRITING DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE	CHILDREN'S WRITING	DESCRIPTION
SJ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · writing via drawing stage · writing via scribbling stage 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · He used mixed drawing & scribbling as communication of a specific and purposeful message and read his drawing & scribbling as if there was writing about them.
DY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · writing via letter-like forms stage 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · In her letter, "O " that is her last name was found. · Several letters look like the basic characters of "Hangul."
JE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · writing via reproducing well-learned units stage · writing via conventional spelling stage 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · She wrote her name and several words correctly. However, in her letter, some letters in several long strings reproduced without apparent meaning.
GT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · writing via conventional spelling stage 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · He wrote his name and several words correctly. · He wrote a letter almost perfectly except several mistakes.

<p>GE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · writing via conventional spelling stage 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · She wrote her name and several words perfectly. · She wrote a letter almost perfectly
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Parents' Perceptions of Children's Writing Development

This survey was conducted on the parents of young children who participated in this study to find out how they are aware of their children's writing development and to understand the role of parents which might be required in their writing development process. We could gain insight into the role of the parents in the children's writing development. All parents who participated in this study did not try to teach writing, but they tried to provide a variety of experience in a relation to children's language acquisition including letters puzzles, letter-shaped blocks and educational toys. What is more, except GE, all the children did not attend any institution that offered a formal literacy education. The results of analysing the parents' perception of their children's writing development are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Results of Parents' Survey

	Parents' perception of writing education	Parents/child encounters with language at home	Professional agencies involved in language instruction
<p>SJ's parents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - never tried to teach him about writing. - believed that enriched literacy environment is helpful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provided books, letter puzzles, letter-shaped blocks. - Gave SJ opportunities to use pencils. 	<p>SJ enrolled in play-oriented toddler program</p>
<p>DY's parents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - never tried to teach her about writing - believed that having much opportunity for contact with letters is good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -provided letter-shaped blocks & toys. 	<p>DY enrolled in play-oriented preschool with an enriched literacy environment without formal teaching</p>

JE's parents	- never tried to teach her writing - provided writing experience by music activity.	- helped and guided when she asked - provided writing experience by music activity.	JE participated in the Sunday school
GT's parents	- never intended to teach writing. - believed that he can learn writing from elementary school.	- helped and guided when he asked.	GT enrolled in preschool where provided many opportunities for contact with books and letter shaped toys and blocks.
GE's parents	- not pushed to learn.	- helped and guided when she asked .	GE enrolled in preschool, which teaches reading and writing basic characters of Hangul.

Cultural Influence on Writing Development

DY's writing in this study, she correctly wrote her last name, “O|” only even if all of the other letters were not acceptable characters in the Korean alphabet, "Hangul" (Table 2). This outcome suggests that there is a cultural difference between Korean learners and English-speaking learners when they start learning to write. American children can write their first name first, then write their last name, whereas Korean children can write their last name first, then their first name (Hildreth, 1936).

Conclusion and Discussions

This study analysed the stages of writing development in children aged 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, reviewed parents' perceptions of their children's writing education and inspected cultural influences shown in children's writing tasks. The results obtained through this study were as follows:

First, the writing of young children exhibited the characteristics of the steps along the age suggested by Sulzby (1985). The developmental stages of the children in this study also supported Dyson's findings (1982). It was found that until age three, children seemed to explore the form of writing by drawing and scribbling. From age four to age six, children's writing began to develop into conventional forms step by step. DY's (aged 3:3) writing and drawing supported the finding that children as young as three displayed signs of knowledge

of writing (Hildreth, 1936; Read, 1971; Harste et al., 1981). Notwithstanding the writing and drawing representations were not obviously conventional to an adult, DY had differentiated between writing and drawing. Her markings appeared to be intentional and purposeful. On the other hand, through SJ's (aged 2) writing, it was noticed that even a two-year-old child might proceed to differentiate writing from drawing. Above all things, as Sulzby insists, the sequence was not in developmental order. For example, JE's writing revealed the characteristics of two stages: reproducing well-learned units stage (fourth stage) and conventional spelling stage (sixth stage).

Second, the parents' awareness of their children's writing development was recognized, and as a result, we could gain insight into the role of the parents in the children's writing development. All parents who participated in this study did not try to teach writing, but they tried to provide a variety of experience in a relation to children's language acquisition including letters puzzles, letter-shaped blocks and educational toys. What is more, except GE, all the children did not attend any institution that offered a formal literacy education. Nevertheless, interestingly young children exhibited the level of writing development suggested by Sulzby. Through this, it was turned out that writing development gradually developed from early years through interaction between young children and the outside, without being formally educated.

The child's literacy opportunities are conditioned by moment-to-moment interpersonal interaction with parents, siblings and others in the household, with respect to informal corrections, explanations and other feedback for the child's experiments with literacy. Teale mentioned that literacy, in the beginning, is an inter-psychological process structured and then supported by the parents, but over a period of time, parental scaffolding self-destructs as the child takes over more of the interaction. Eventually, reading and writing become an intra-psychological process, and the child is an independent reader and at the same time writer (Teale, 1982).

JE's (age 4) parents never intended to teach their daughters how to write. However, once the parents saw that she was interested in writing activities, her parents helped her. JE's father responded whenever she asked him to write some words or read storybooks. He reacted to his child's needs and interests actively. JE is just four years old, but she could write many words even though she has never been enrolled in an early childhood educational center; except Sunday school. In this study, it is worthwhile to note that young children can learn to write without formal teaching and furthermore, parents play a key role in influencing the early achievement of their children's writing development.

Some researchers maintained that lots of young children in a literate society already are acquainted with the meaning of prints as well as functions and forms before instruction



begins in school (Clay, 1975; Dyson, 1985; Goodman, 1985; Harste et al. 1984). Meaning is a result of print interpretation within a series of language events. Meaning is neither caused by the environment, or by the brain of the learner who understands a particular language situation. Children are acquiring language and the symbol system for adults in interactive communities.

Third, there was a cultural influence on the development process of young children's writing. DY (age 3) produced letter-shaped figures when she was asked to write a letter. However, she correctly wrote her last name, "O|" only even if all of the other letters were not acceptable characters in the Korean alphabet, "Hangul." In Korea, the family name is written in the first order while in English the first name is written in the first order. From this outcome, it was drawn that a cultural difference in name writing was reflected in children's writing development. As for cultural awareness, Hildreth (1936) affirmed "writing the last name came late in the age series and appeared to come rather suddenly. As soon as the first name had been successfully achieved, apparently the last name followed promptly with little difficulty."

One of the implications from this research is that both parents and teachers need to be conscious that conveying meaning is the function of written language, and that meaning must always be central in instructional considerations. Both parents and teachers are to help children's learning in conventional forms of writing and furthermore they have to remember that the semantic function of writing should be emphasized while children learn traditional forms of writing. This means that writing should be an activity that takes 'meaning' seriously. Children are supposed to be given plenty of opportunities to write and to receive feedback about their writing. Only by observing the written language of others can children obtain the necessary data to generate their own hypotheses and apprehend on how the language works.

On top of that, it is not desirable to view the children's writing as ability achieved by drilling children with specific and confined skills. Instead, parents and teachers need to build on children's existing knowledge of writing and support their writing to evolve. In this study, it was concluded that children learn best in meaningful situations. Children have developed their levels of writing in social and cultural contexts through interaction with adults and other children. Therefore, the instructions they receive should reflect, to a certain extent, the natural and meaningful ways in which they have learned what they already know. Problems arise when the developmental, social, and natural environments in which literacy flourishes are exchanged for a systematic presentation of skills that do not reflect the child's stage of development, socially, emotionally, physically or intellectually (Morrow, 1989).



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